

The Partaking Of The Lord's Supper

Introduction. One of the blessings as well as an important responsibility for the Christian is the practice of assembling regularly with other Christians. We have an example of Christians assembling in Acts 20:7 and we have an explicit command not to forsake our assembling together in Hebrews 10:25.

The purpose of our assembling is threefold: (1) to express praise and devotion to God and Christ; (2) to exhort and encourage our brethren to greater service; and, (3) to receive such encouragement ourselves.

Before His death, Jesus instituted what we call the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). As recorded by Luke, Jesus wanted His disciples to do this in His memory (Luke 22:19). The importance of properly observing the Lord's Supper should not be underestimated. The church at Corinth was guilty of abusing it (1 Corinthians 11:20-22) and those misuses have serious consequences (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). That we might observe the Supper properly, to receive its blessings rather than condemnation, let's use this opportunity to review what is revealed about the purpose and observance of the Lord's Supper.

I. ***The Meaning Of The Supper***

A. It is a memorial.

1. Note Paul's account was given by the Lord Himself (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).
 - a) We eat the bread in memory of His body.
 - b) We drink the cup or the fruit of the vine in memory of His blood.
2. We therefore commemorate the death of Jesus on the cross (Matthew 26:28).
 - a) Whose death makes the new covenant possible (Hebrews 9:16).
 - b) Whose blood was shed for the remission of sins (Ephesians 1:7).
3. As the Passover was a memorial commemorating Israel's deliverance from Egypt through the blood of the lambs on the door post, so the Supper is a memorial of our Lord's death who makes our deliverance from the bondage of sin possible.

B. It is a proclamation.

1. We proclaim our faith in the effectiveness of the Lord's death (1 Corinthians 11:26).
 - a) That His death was indeed for our sins.
 - b) If we did not believe it, why keep the Supper?
2. We also proclaim our faith in the Lord's return (1 Corinthians 11:26).
 - a) For it is to be done "till He comes."

- b) If we do not believe He is coming, then why keep the Supper?
 - 3. Thus the Lord's Supper looks forward as well as backward, and will ever be observed by His disciples who trust in His redemption and anticipate His return!
- C. It is a communion.
 - 1. A fellowship or sharing in the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16).
 - a) As we partake, we commune with the blood of Christ.
 - b) Perhaps in the sense of reinforcing blessings we enjoy through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7-9).
 - 2. A fellowship or sharing in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).
 - a) As we partake, we commune with the body of Christ.
 - b) Perhaps in the sense of reinforcing fellowship together in the body of Christ (i.e., the church), as we break bread together.
 - 3. The Lord's Supper, which is also called "communion" and "breaking of bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16; Acts 2:42; 20:7) certainly has great significance and should not be taken lightly.

II. ***The Observance Of The Supper***

- A. It is to be done with reverence.
 - 1. That is, "in a worthy manner" (NKJV) (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).
 - a) The KJV says "worthily," which some have misunderstood.
 - b) It is an adverb, describing how we take it, not whether we are worthy (none are truly worthy).
 - 2. We partake with a respect for the supreme price Jesus paid for our sins.
 - a) Think of the cruel torture and humiliation of His physical body.
 - b) Think of the spiritual anguish suffered as the Son of God bore the punishment for our sins (Matthew 27:46).
 - 3. A failure to observe with proper reverence brings condemnation (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).
 - a) One will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.
 - b) One will eat and drink judgment to himself.
 - c) To make light of this memorial puts one in the same category as those who mocked Him as He hung on the cross.
- B. It is to be done with self-examination.
 - 1. Such as reflecting upon one's spiritual condition (1 Corinthians 11:28).
 - 2. Are we living in a manner that shows appreciation for His sacrifice?
 - a) By accepting the grace of God in our lives (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:1)?
 - b) By living for Jesus who died for us (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Galatians 2:20)?

3. Or are we by willful sinning, guilty of having:
 - a) "trampled the Son of God underfoot?"
 - b) "counted the blood by which [we were] sanctified a common thing?"
 - c) "insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:26-29).
 4. Do we, by refusing to repent of our sins, "crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an shame?" (Hebrews 6:4-6).
 5. In one sense, the Supper is a very private matter between a Christian and God; a time to reflect the past and to resolve for the future.
- C. It is to be done with other Christians.
1. There is ample indication the Supper is designed to be a communal meal.
 - a) The disciples "came together" to break bread (Acts 20:7).
 - b) When they came together, they were to "wait for one another" (1 Corinthians 11:33).
 - c) Partaking together of "one bread," they demonstrate they are "one bread and one body" (1 Corinthians 10:16).
 2. We commune not just with the Lord, but with one another.
- D. It is to be done often.
1. The biblical evidence is that it was done weekly.
 - a) Christians came together on the first day of the week to "break bread" (Acts 20:7).
 - b) Other indications of a weekly observance:
 - (1) The church at Corinth was coming together to eat the Lord's Supper, though they were abusing it (1 Corinthians 11:17-22).
 - (2) Instructions concerning the collection suggest their coming together was on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
 - c) Following the divinely approved example of Christians in the Bible, we know God approves of a weekly observance on the first day of the week.
 2. The earliest historical evidence outside the Bible confirms the day and frequency.
 - a) The Didache (ca. 95 A.D.) indicates Christians were to come together on the first day of the week to break bread (Didache 14:1).
 - b) Justin Martyr (ca. 150 A.D.) records how Christians assembled on Sunday and partook of the Supper (Apology I, 67).
 3. Some believe that a weekly observance diminishes the importance of the Supper.

- a) Which is why some do it monthly, quarterly, or annually.
- b) But does the frequent practice of:
 - (1) Assembling diminishing its value and importance?
 - (2) Singing praises and offering prayers devalue their benefits?
 - (3) Preaching and studying God's Word decrease their significance to our lives?
- 4. Our spirituality is dependent upon the value and benefits of our Lord's death on the cross; a weekly observance of the memorial helps us to live accordingly.

Conclusion. The Lord's Supper is a very special memorial of His death for our sins. Instituted by Jesus Himself, He asked His disciples to do it in His memory. The first Christians "continued steadfastly" in its observance just as they did in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship and prayer (Acts 2:42). Christians today should never lose sight of its significance. It is a constant reminder of the sacrifice Jesus paid for our sins. It is a communion or sharing of the body and blood of the Lord. It is a time for self-examination and rededication of our service to the Lord. And it is a means for building fellowship with one another in the body of Christ.

In order to benefit from our assemblies, one must first keep in mind who is present. First, our brethren in Christ are present. They are people like you, who appreciate the presence and encouragement of other Christians. So take the time to visit with them before and after the assembly. Second, visitors are frequently present. They draw conclusions about the congregation during their visit. So take the time to visit with them. Third, our Lord is present. Do we act as we would if He were bodily present?

You get out of the assembly what you put into it. Praying about what you are going to do and planning what you can do (such as welcoming and visiting) can make a truly edifying assembly. Come to serve, not to be served and you will be blessed in return. The more you attend and the more interest you show, the more you will grow. "How often do I have to come?" is indicative of grave spiritual immaturity. It displays a lack of true love for Christ and it shows that one is selfishly concerned with how little they can do to save themselves.